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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Access to information and participant in communication</th>
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Access To Information And Participant In Communication

By

Dean Armando Malay
ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNICATION

By: Dean Armando Malay

They knew that in a few years, the land is going to settle down and all the buildings will go down. And that is what is happening now! But what did they do? They spent hundreds of millions of pesos to build those edifice and now, they are crumbling. Who are the sufferers? It is not Mrs. Marcos! She had her moments of glory when she viewed them at the foyer in her beautiful terno. Who suffered? The people from whom the taxes were taken. This is an example and I can multiply that by dozens of other examples of government projects which were imposed on the people without asking them first about alternatives, problems etc. So, this is the second one. The flow from top to bottom and the bottom to top. This is the hard problem of communication.

Number three is the diversity of languages in the Philippines. Although Tagalog and English are widely spoken by a big group, you will admit that there are still large areas where the people do not understand the newspapers and the pamphlets being distributed and sold. In other countries, there is not much of this problem. In Japan, for example, I think the whole Japanese people understand Japanese. But I think in India and Indonesia, we still have language problems.

So, we have it here. We have ninety dialects in the Philippines. So, the diversity of language in the Philippines is a deterrent to the flow of information.

Number four is the question of monopolies. Newspapers and other media used to be owned by two or three families. Before martial law, we had four or five families that owned not only newspapers but radio and TV stations. In other words, they had a monopoly of mass media and this was the cause of so much resentment. When the people began to lose confidence in the credibility of government, they expected the press to come to their rescue. This shows that when you have only four families owning the media in the country, you have a very dangerous situation. Provided these families keep fighting among themselves, the people will get both sides of issues. But when they coalesce, merge or see eye to eye on such areas as capitalism profit sharing etc. you do not get contrary opinion.

What happens when you do not get contrary opinion? When, for example, you do not get the opposition to say: the government is doing wrong? When you do not have these, then what occurs is a very dangerous situation.
This is only as far as the local monopolies are concerned. The bigger concern of the Philippine press before 1972 was the monopoly by capitalist countries of the means of communication from which we got news from outside the Philippines. And I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that we are dependent practically fully dependent - on the American and one British news agencies. They are the ones who feed us news from outside the world. And naturally, if they are the ones feeding us the news and they also control the communication facilities, they can control. This is part of an imperialism that is different from the imperialism of the sixteenth and seventeenth century where imperialist countries simply occupied colonized countries, imposed their laws and you have no choice but to follow. This new imperialism is more insidious. In other words, they try to control our thinking and this is done in very great part by the fact that we get our news about the world through agencies that are not our own. In other words, when we want to find out what Washington thinks of Manila, we have to depend on the Associated Press or the United Press to tell us what they learned about Reagan's attitude towards Cory. Some of our newspapers have correspondents in Washington and New York. But when it comes to the rest of the world, especially about our brothers in the third world, we get our news from multinational news agencies that can manipulate the news. So that India becomes bad in our eyes and we do not have a way of checking whether that is true or not. In other words, they can divide the third world by manipulating news. This is a very serious problem. The United Nation is trying to do something about it. UNESCO is trying to do something about it. But everytime the UNESCO tries to do something about it, America threatens to pull out contributions to the UNESCO and say: you go on your own. I am not saying that other countries are not doing it. Maybe, Russia is also doing it. But we are familiar with it and it is being done by the United States of America in the Philippines.

But then, there again is the problem of credibility of information coming from the government. This is the crux of our problem here. No matter how honest and persevering you are, if there are defects in the structure and in the bureaucracy itself which is so overpowering, there is nothing you can do about it. The only thing you can do is to insist on your integrity. In other words, you should insist that your article should, say, contain this paragraph or so. Because, you may submit your article to an information officer and he says: we will take this out! It's good if he tells you because you can explain and perhaps prevail on him. But what happens is, they just take things out so that when it appears the next day,
DISCUSSION

summary of important points

1. In regards to Channel Four, during the past fourteen years people used to skip it. They have come to a point where, while they could not criticize government because they are government-funded, they try to present the news in a balance way to the people.

2. Regarding "Cordillera News", the staffers do not receive salaries. It is a community-based project. They depend mainly on subscribers. But the question is: how long can they last without salaries?

   This is the problem. You have a family but you volunteer and miss your chance to earn money elsewhere. But you miss the chance because you believe communication is very much needed in your area. And yet you can not get anything ... How long can you last?

   Question: why not get sponsors?

   Answer: It's hard to get sponsors because it is a news service. It is easier said than done.

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